



Announcement of Public Preparedness Planning Group

From May 28, 2002 letter from the County Manager, Ron Carlee, to Jim Pebley, President of the Civic Federation for announcement at the May 29, 2002 Civic Federation Leadership Forum

I regret that I cannot attend the Civic Federation Leader's Forum on Emergency Preparedness. I am fulfilling a long-standing commitment to share lessons learned from 9/11 at a conference of Pennsylvania city and county managers.

As County staff have de-briefed after 9/11, we remain extraordinarily proud of the professionalism of the emergency response and the effectiveness of our Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, which was initially created in 1956. We also learned that the Arlington community is fully prepared to do whatever is necessary to support an emergency response.

As part of a commitment to continuous improvement, an area in which we have concluded that we must take our planning to a new level is in public preparedness and communication. This is important so that we can take full advantage of the public's willingness and desire to support emergency efforts.

On 9/11, we were able to immediately implement a 24/7 informational hotline and mental health hotline. We also transformed the web site and cable channel into virtual newspapers. However, the public did not have an existing knowledge of these resources. Communication efforts also had to be continuously improved to approach the level of effectiveness expected and needed by the public. We also needed more effective procedures for harnessing the energy of the public into effective support of the response.

To enhance emergency preparedness we need to accomplish the following:

- Enhance communication systems to the public;
- Ensure public awareness of emergency communications procedures; and
- Provide the public with greater understanding on how to prepare for and respond to different emergency scenarios.

The Civic Federation Leader's Forum provides an excellent opportunity to initiate these objectives.

I am pleased to announce the appointment of a Public Preparedness Planning Group to take public preparedness to the next step. This action is based on guidance from the County Board, which included an emphasis on both emergency response and civic participation as part of its 2002 strategic objectives. As part of the Fiscal Year 2003 budget, the County Board also

approved an additional position for emergency coordination to specifically focus on public preparedness.

The planning group that I am forming is charged with developing recommendations for the creation of a model public preparedness program. I have asked Jackie Snelling of the Civic Federation to chair this 60-day effort, with staff leadership from Clare Halsey of the Fire Department. I have asked the following organizations to name members to the Planning Group:

- Arlington County Disability Commission
- Chamber of Commerce
- County Council of PTAs
- Interfaith Council
- Red Cross
- United Way.

The group is empowered to add representation as necessary to ensure inclusion across Arlington's diverse population. The Police Department and Department of Human Services will provide additional staff leadership.

The purpose of the Planning Group is to recommend the structure of an on-going public preparedness council including mission, membership, and initial work plan with timelines. The program designed by the group should achieve the following:

- Create a model program that is consistent with FEMA recommendations;
- Enable the creation of an on-going Public Preparedness Council by Labor Day;
- Achieve new public preparedness procedures by the 2002/2003 winter storm season; and
- Identify incremental improvements that can be made continuously.

Additionally, staff is working on a new public notification system that will use existing pagers, cell phones, and e-mail for emergency notices. While I do not want to raise expectations prematurely, I want you to know that we are aggressively pursuing new technologies that Arlington would be the first in the nation to implement.

On 9/11, Arlington demonstrated a world-class response to the Pentagon. We must sustain this capacity while extending it to the full community. The leadership of the Civic Federation in this effort is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,
Ron Carlee
County Manager